

Title IX and Girl's Athletics

In 1972 Congress passed the Educational Amendments. One section of this law, Title IX, prohibits discrimination against girls and women in federally-funded education, including in athletics programs. As a result of Title IX, women and girls have benefited from more participation opportunities and more equitable facilities. Women who were under 10 when Title IX passed have much higher sports participation rates than women who grew up before Title IX. Fifty-five percent of the "post-Title IX" generation participated in high school sports, compared to 36% of the "pre-Title IX" generation. Because of Title IX, more women have received athletic scholarships and thus the opportunity for higher education than would have been possible otherwise. In fact, many women Olympic athletes credit Title IX for the opportunity to attend college through athletic scholarships and to participate in sports. In addition, because of Title IX the salaries of coaches for women's teams have increased.

College Athletics

Women increased their representation as college athletes as a result of Title IX. In 1972, women comprised only 15.6% of college athletes. As of 1993, that percentage has grown to 34.8%. These statistics are deceptive, however, because since the early 1980s the percentage of women athletes has been increasing very slowly, and in some years has decreased. In 1981-82 women were 30.5% of athletes and that percentage increased only to 34.8% in 1992-93. While more women are playing college sports now, there are more men college athletes as well. In 1972, there were 31,852 women athletes and 172,447 men athletes at National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) member institutions. By 1993 there were 99,859 women athletes and 187,041 men athletes. Often coaches of men's sports try to argue against gender equity, saying it takes away opportunities from men. But this has not proven to be true.

Women are also shortchanged in athletic funding. In 1991, at the request of the National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators, the NCAA conducted a study analyzing expenditures for women's and men's athletics. The study revealed major inequities in the funding of men's and women's college athletics. The NCAA themselves called the findings "disturbing." Although the numbers of women and men on campus were roughly equal, the NCAA found that men received 70% of scholarship money, 77% of operating budgets, and 83% of recruiting money. The inequities deny women not only the equal opportunity to benefit from sports, but sometimes the opportunity to attend college at all because they were not offered an athletic scholarship.

High School Sports

Girls entered high school sports rapidly after the passage of Title IX. In 1972, only 7% of interscholastic athletes were girls. By 1992, 37% of those athletes were female. Since the late 70s, however, the percentage of girl athletes has been increasing very slowly or decreasing. In 1977-78, girls were about 32% of athletes, and this percentage has grown only an additional 5% - to 37% in 1992-93. If this trend continues, it will take girls about 40 years (until the year 2033) to achieve parity. Even more disturbing, a study by the Department of Education shows that the percentage of high school girl sophomores who participate in athletic teams has actually declined from 1980 to 1990. In 1980, 46% of 10th-grade girls were members of interscholastic or intramural athletic teams, but only 41% in 1990. The percentage of boys who participated in athletics remained steady at 63%.

As with college athletics, the addition of girl athletes in high school has not proven to take away opportunities for boys to play sports. In 1972, 49% of high school boys were athletes; by 1993, 52% of high school boys were athletes. There were 817,073 girls and 3,770,621 boys participating in interscholastic athletics in 1972. By 1993, with declining high school enrollments, 1,997,489 girls and 3,416,389 boys were high school athletes. No national data are currently available on expenditures for girls' and boys' athletics in high school.

Source: Feminist Majority Foundation

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Women as Coaches and Athletics Administrators

There are still significantly fewer women coaches and administrators than men coaches and administrators. One reason is that as the salaries of coaches of women's teams increased with Title IX, male coaches began to displace female coaches. In 1972, the year Title IX was signed into law, over 90% of women's teams were coached by women. Now, half of women's college teams are coached by men, but only about 2% of men's teams are coached by women. The record is not much better at secondary schools. As of 1990, over 40% of girls' teams were coached by men, but only 2% of boys' teams are coached by women. Seventy-five percent of all high school teams were coached by men.

Women are also excluded from administrative positions within sports. Only 21% of college women's athletic programs are headed by women, and women fill only 33% of all administrative jobs in women's programs. In high school, less than 20% of athletic directors are women, and less than 40% of directors of physical education are women.

Health Benefits of Sports

Many studies have shown the importance of exercise in increasing cardiovascular endurance and strength, and decreasing the chances of heart attacks, strokes, back problems, osteoporosis, and other health problems. A recent study shows that women who exercise regularly from the onset on their menstrual cycle throughout their childbearing years can significantly reduce their risk of contracting premenopausal breast cancer. Women who exercised at least 4 hours/week reduced their risk by over 50%, and women who exercised 1-3 hours/week reduced their risk by 30%. These findings are similar to a 1981 study conducted at Harvard's Graduate School of Public Health, under Dr. Rose Frisch, which showed that young women who participated in college sports, or who exercised regularly in college, were significantly less likely to contract breast cancer and other reproductive cancers.

Academic and Leadership Benefits of Sports

Participating in sports also has been found to increase young women's (and young men's) self-esteem. High school athletes were more likely to describe themselves as "highly popular" than non-athletes. Sports also confers academic benefits. High school girls (and boys) who participate in sports have higher grades than non-athletes. In addition, a larger percentage of athletes scored in the top quartile on a standardized test. The positive effects of sports on grades were especially pronounced for Hispanic girls: 20% of Hispanic girl athletes reported receiving high grades compared to 9% of non-athletes, and 39% scored in the top quartile of a standardized test, compared to 23% of non-athletes.

Rural Hispanic girls and suburban and rural white girls who were athletes had lower school drop-out rates and were more likely to go to a four-year college than non-athletes. Furthermore, high school athletes are more likely than non-athletes to aspire to be leaders in their communities as adults. If girls are to grow up to be leaders, they need comparable opportunities to develop their leadership skills through team sports. Expanding sports opportunities for women and girls will help achieve the feminization of power in all realms.

How can girls be encouraged to exercise? Parents' influence is important. Girls are more likely to participate if they have a parent who participated as a child, or who still plays sports. Also, parents can help by insisting schools provide equal facilities and opportunities to their daughters and sons. Unfortunately, even girls who participate in sports and fitness cite obstacles, such as boys who refuse to pass balls to girls, or who criticize girls' performances; girls getting picked for teams after all the boys are picked; gym teachers who assume girls are not as good as boys; and better coaches and equipment for boys' teams.

While black and white girls participate equally in sports and fitness, black girls who quit sports are more likely to have problems with transportation or inadequate funds. In addition, more black girls than white girls feel boys make fun of girls who play sports.

For Additional Information

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U.S. Department of Labor	1-866-487-2365

http://www.aauw.org/
http://www.feminist.org/
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